

60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE

FREEDOM RIDERS

MAY 14, 2021



A DAY TO REMEMBER



01



02



03

**FREEDOM RIDERS
CHARLES PERSON &
HANK THOMAS**



04



05



06



07

THE SPEAKERS & PERFORMERS:

01 VICE MAYOR CIARA SMITH

02 FREEDOM RIDERS MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

03 KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

**CHARLES PERSON &
HANK THOMAS**

**04 COMMISSIONER
FRED WILSON**

**05 FREEDOM RIDERS PARK
BOARD MEMBERS**

**06 FREEDOM RIDERS MONUMENT
SUPERINTENDENT KRIS
BUTCHER**

07 ARCHITECT STEVE LEWIS



4309 MCCLELLAN BLVD,
ANNISTON, AL 36206
256-846-2044
JHODGES@ANNISTONAL.GOV



WWW.ANNISTONAL.GOV

"Someone like me, standing in an official elected position, and because of you, I can do that."

- Anniston Vice Mayor | Ciara Smith



**Anniston Mayor
Jack Draper**



**State Representative
Dr. Barbara Boyd**

Today, the two sites are recognized as part of the national Civil Rights Trail. The city of Anniston, in partnership with the National Park Service, Calhoun County, the county's Chamber of Commerce, Jacksonville State University and others, planned a two-day celebration to honor the 60th Anniversary of these brave Freedom Riders. The events were held from May 14th to May 15th, outside the National Park Service building at 1031 Gurnee Ave., Anniston, 36201.

The keynote speakers were original Freedom Riders Hank Thomas and Charles Person, who was on the Greyhound bus that was attacked twice in Anniston. When speaking on why he joined the Freedom Rides, Mr. Thomas explained simply that he "had seen something wrong, and did something about it." Mr. Person echoed those sentiments when reflecting on Anniston, stating, "We have to start somewhere. The time is now, and I think Anniston has the history to show that change can come about and can come about peacefully. We can discuss these things without animosity and without bitterness."

1961 was a year of change; however, that change required sacrifice. The issue at hand was the South's refusal to comply with a Supreme Court ruling that had struck down laws which previously had prohibited blacks and whites from sitting together on busses.

In an effort to overcome this refusal to change, over 60 Freedom Rides took place throughout 1961. During these rides, more than 400 young blacks and whites took part in the effort to stand against the Jim Crow transportation laws of the Southern States. Yet, as mentioned there would be sacrifice, and it came when one particular group of Freedom Riders took a Mother's Day stop in Anniston, AL.

While in Anniston, protesters attacked the Freedom Riders at the Anniston bus stop. The attackers flattened the tires to the bus, and as the driver tried to get away, the bus eventually gave out and was forced to stop again on Old Birmingham Highway, just outside of Anniston, where it was attacked again, this time being set on fire.

The master of ceremonies for this event was Anniston's very own City Councilwoman, Ciara Smith. Councilwoman Smith led the event so beautifully, and after hearing both Mr. Thomas and Mr. Persons explain how they both know their journey in life may soon end with the coming of old age. She confidently looked towards the two men and in reference to their life's cause, she said, "Someone like me, (who is) standing in an official elected position, and because of you, I can do that...when you pass through to the next life, know that I will still be 'breathing' for you."

Overall, the event was moving and inspirational. The City of Anniston is beyond thankful for the legacy and impact of Mr. Thomas and Mr. Persons, as well as every other Freedom Rider who fought so hard for justice and equality. Mayor Draper may have summed it up best when he said, "...to the Freedom Riders, we thank you for your courage, your selflessness and your dedication to the cause that opened this nation's eyes to the struggle for civil rights. This national monument will assure that your contribution to humanity will never be forgotten."